

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview and Mission Statement

The Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan covers the area from the Route 99 junction with Interstate 5 in Kern County to Sacramento County. This 274-mile section of Route 99 runs south to north through the counties of Kern, Tulare, Fresno, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin in the San Joaquin Valley. It also spans Caltrans' Districts 6 and 10 (Figure 1-4). Farther to the north in Caltrans District 3, Route 99 crosses Sacramento and Sutter counties. This northern part of Route 99 is not covered in the master plan.



Figure 1-1
Identifying transportation-related needs along the corridor.

Along the corridor from Interstate 5 to Lodi, the appearance of Route 99 changes from county to county, with varying styles of structures, slope paving, median treatments, soundwalls, retaining walls, and landscaping.

Caltrans and local communities are working together to develop a master plan to improve the Route 99 corridor (Figures 1-1,

1-2, and 1-3). The Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan will strengthen community identity, unify freeway improvements, and develop design concepts that tie communities throughout the corridor together and foster a valleywide identity. In addition to dealing with aesthetic concerns, this document will discuss capacity and operational needs as increased regional and inter-regional traffic puts more stress on the corridor.

As a major route in the most productive agricultural region



Figure 1-2
Caltrans and local communities working together to develop a master plan.

in the world, Route 99 is critical to the economic vitality of the state. Senate Concurrent Resolution 17, authored by Senator Jim Costa in 2002, recognized this and directed Caltrans to identify transportation-related needs along the corridor that will relieve congestion and improve the movement of goods,



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Figure 1-3
Doug Jackson of the Great Valley Center gives a presentation on Route 99 to the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Project Development Team

enhancing economic development of the San Joaquin Valley. The resulting SCR 17 report titled “Report on Transportation Needs between Bakersfield and Sacramento” (May 2002) summarizes these needs.

The emphasis of this Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan is to promote unity in landscape and structural aesthetics throughout the Route 99 corridor, as well as to recognize the capacity needs as related in the Senate Concurrent Resolution 17 report. The Master Plan is intended to cover the seven counties mentioned above, but will also be coordinated with other planning efforts to improve Route 99 from Bakersfield to Sacramento.

By looking at this big picture, the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan will create a lasting legacy that promotes economic opportunity and a better quality of life for all of the communities along the corridor.

CALTRANS MISSION:

Caltrans Improves Mobility Across California

MASTER PLAN MISSION STATEMENT:

To produce a Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan which guides public and private sector decisions; provides a corridor identity; lays out specific improvement approaches and themes; is collaborative with other Route 99 plans and programs; and has wide community and public involvement that results in ownership of the plan by all.





Figure 1-4



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What Does “Corridor” Mean?

The Corridor as defined for the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan encompasses:

- *The area under the direct control of Caltrans, including the ultimate right-of-way for State Route 99.*
- *The immediate view from the right-of-way. This area involves a collaborative planning effort between Caltrans and local planning agencies.*

1.2 Goals with Supporting Objectives and Strategies

The following goals will guide Caltrans improvements and local actions along the Route 99 Corridor. Each goal is followed by objectives and strategies, which are specific actions, designed to fulfill the mission of the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan.

Goal 1: Adopt a Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan that is universally accepted and guides public and private sector decisions along the corridor.

Objective 1A

Obtain resolutions of acceptance for the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan from cities and counties.

Strategies to Support Objective 1A:

- Actively encourage local entities to take action in support of the Master Plan.
- Actively encourage cities and counties to approve local land use ordinances that support the concepts of the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan.
- Caltrans staff will be available to any entity along the Route 99 corridor to provide expertise on the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan.



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Objective 1B

Obtain public input and support for the Master Plan.

Strategies to support Objective 1B:

- Seek public input as the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan is being developed and periodically thereafter.
 - Use Regional Transportation Planning Agency forums as one method of obtaining public input.
 - Conduct at least one public workshop in both Caltrans District 6 and District 10 during the development and any update of the Master Plan.
 - It will be Caltrans' policy to continuously post the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan on the Web sites of Caltrans District 6 and District 10.
- The Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Advisory Team will decide whether individual city, county, and community proposals are consistent with Route 99 Corridor themes. The intent is to permit local proposals while staying consistent with corridor themes.

Objective 1C

Enhance individual community identity.

Strategies to support Objective 1C:

- Establish an ongoing Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Advisory Team committed to review and comment on projects or proposals in or next to the corridor and to participate in the update of the Master Plan as appropriate. By guiding decisions that affect the corridor, this team will make sure the Master Plan continues to have life and meaning. The current Project Development Team for the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan will establish the composition, structure, and authority of the advisory team as part of the final Master Plan.



Figure 1-5
Local government employees provide input on the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan



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Goal 2: Create a San Joaquin Valley Route 99 Corridor identity.

Objective 2A

Establish a Route 99 corridor logo.

Strategies to support Objective 2A:

- The Route 99 Corridor logo will be selected by the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Project Development Team. The logo is primarily intended to be used for the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan and any related documents. An alternate logo reflecting a corridor theme(s) may be used on signs along the corridor.
- Any use of the logo for signs along the corridor must comply with current state and federal sign standards and policies and must be approved by Caltrans. Individual counties or communities may use the Route 99 Corridor logo or a different design for signs.

Objective 2B

Establish corridor themes (landscape, color, median, structures, etc).

Strategies to support Objective 2B:

- Corridor themes will be established and updated as needed by the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Advisory Team.

- Specific application of corridor themes must be consistent with current state and federal standards and policies and approved by Caltrans.
- Specific city, county, and community plans related to the Route 99 corridor are encouraged and will be reviewed by Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Advisory Team for consistency with the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan.

Objective 2C

Develop design concepts and aesthetic guidelines.

Strategies to support Objective 2C:

- Design concepts will comply with the most currently approved Caltrans design standards.
- Design concepts and aesthetic treatments applied along the Route 99 corridor will be consistent with the most current Caltrans policy on Context Sensitive Solutions (see Section 4.1).

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Goal 3: Establish a plan that improves operations, maximizes safety, fosters economic vitality, and protects environmental resources.

Objective 3A

Advocate overall corridor needs.

Strategies to support Objective 3A:

- Support safety, congestion relief and rehabilitation improvements consistent with the Route 99 Transportation Concept Report (TCR) and the Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan (ITSP).
- Ensure the safety of drivers and maintenance workers first before considering any proposals to add signs or public art.
- Establish and update a Route 99 Corridor Action Plan every two years consisting of proposed project improvements covering the next 20 years.

Objective 3B

Establish corridor improvement principles by category of improvement (added capacity, soundwalls, rehabilitation, median barriers, traveler information, etc.) or enhancement (landscape, color schemes, structure treatment, etc.).

Strategies to support Objective 3B:

- Proposals for traditional improvements (new capacity,

rehabilitation, median barriers, soundwalls, etc.) will be based upon established criteria.

- Proposals for non-traditional improvements (environmental enhancements, traveler information services, bridge and soundwall treatments, etc.) or those proposed improvements without established criteria will be reviewed by the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Advisory Team and submitted to Caltrans for final approval.

1.3 Challenges

Route 99 is an integral part of the state highway system and it crosses many diverse areas. The effort to produce a Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan will require input and consensus from many departments within Caltrans, as well as local partners. At a minimum, we face the following challenges:

1. Reaching a consensus among local partners with respect to highway treatments and themes.
2. Reaching a consensus among departments within Caltrans to achieve a balance between design requirements, budget limitations, physical constraints, and aesthetic possibilities.
3. Keeping the planning effort focused, specific and concise, while being timely and complete.
4. Developing a plan that will stand the test of time.
5. Creating an aesthetically pleasing route with limited right-of-way.
6. Recognizing the demand for capacity-increasing improvements that SCR 17 mandates, despite limited state-owned right-of-way.



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1.4 Local and Regional Cooperation

Local enhancement plans are encouraged. The intent of the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan process is to offer opportunity for unique community expression while promoting an overall corridor theme. Up and down the San Joaquin Valley, beautification of the Route 99 corridor has become a priority. From county groups to small rural communities, efforts are unfolding to make Route 99 more attractive. Following is a list of some of these current beautification efforts:

DISTRICT 6

- **Fresno County - The Association for the Beautification of Highway 99**

The first product produced for the county by this association was the “Highway 99 Beautification Master Plan.” The implementation of the plan is an ongoing effort for the association.

- **Bakersfield Freeway Beautification Advisory Committee**

The goal of this group is to produce a “Freeway Beautification Plan” for Bakersfield. The focus of this effort is the Route 99 corridor, with Routes 58 and 178 included as well.

- **Pixley Redevelopment Project Area Committee**

One of the goals of this plan is landscaping of the Highway 99 Pixley Corridor. Committee members are actively pursuing support for this project.

- **Goshen Community Plan**

This plan is a component of the Tulare County General Plan

Elements addressing aesthetics along the Route 99 corridor are included in the plan.

DISTRICT 10

- **Turlock**

The city has developed a Beautification Master Plan that includes the Route 99 corridor. The plan proposes to landscape a portion of Route 99 and its interchanges in orchard patterns. It also proposes “gateway” entrances with attractive streetscaping, signs, planters, and lighting.

- **Stanislaus County**

The Stanislaus Council of Governments is setting up a Route 99 Corridor Task Force to develop a “Corridor Enhancement Plan” that will span the entire county. A Route 99 Enhancement Partnership for an Integrated Planning Team, an extension of this effort, will focus on improving and expediting efforts to improve the image of the community along Route 99.

- **Stockton Beautiful**

Beautification efforts for this group include the Route 99 corridor.

VALLEYWIDE

- **The Great Valley Center**

A Highway 99 Task Force has been organized and is working on developing a cohesive approach to transform the Route 99 corridor into a “Main Street of the San Joaquin Valley.” The limits of the project stretch from Kern County to San Joaquin County.



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1.5 Public Outreach

From the outset it was recognized how important it would be to reach out to the varied stakeholders along the corridor. The key objectives of the public outreach effort included the following:

- obtain input and ideas for the Master Plan, and provide forums for parties to express their comments;
- facilitate effective communication between transportation decision-makers, the public and private sectors, and in particular underrepresented communities affected by transportation planning along the identified route;
- communicate the need to clearly identify future segment improvements and needs;
- provide general and technical information to interested groups and individuals in the project area; and
- generate confidence and credibility in the process and final product.

1.5.1 GVC Highway 99 Task Force

The Great Valley Center, representing the interests of the entire Central Valley, established a Highway 99 Task Force with the purpose of “transforming Highway 99 from the San Joaquin Valley’s Back Alley to its Main Street”. The Task Force consists of a group of business, government, and community leaders working to develop the Highway 99 corridor into a truly compelling “Main Street of the San Joaquin Valley”. Caltrans is a member

of the Highway 99 Task Force and the Great Valley Center is a member of the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Advisory Committee. The resulting collaborative effort has proven to demonstrate invaluable benefits in terms of reaching corridor stakeholders that traditionally have not participated in transportation planning.

In May, 2004, the Task Force produced the “Route 99 Corridor Improvement Guide”. This guide is considered a companion document to the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan. It is available on the Great Valley Center internet site. It offers information to the public about ways grass roots groups and local decision makers can do to cause changes that can improve the driving experience, enhance tourism and strengthen opportunity for economic vitality.

1.5.2 Public Participation Plan

At the onset of the public participation effort, stakeholder interviews were conducted, and a public participation plan was designed to lay out strategies for gathering input from the general public, elected officials, community-based organizations (CBOs), and traditionally underrepresented populations. Specifically, the public participation plan consisted of several outreach tactics that included:

- refining and expanding a contacts database,
- conducting five public meetings along the corridor,
- developing and distributing a meeting announcement/newsletter,



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- conducting media-relations efforts,
- contacting community and stakeholder representatives to solicit participation and to disseminate information, and
- contacting elected officials.

Public Outreach/Publicity

To encourage participation at the public meetings, an aggressive public outreach campaign was conducted to reach community members along the corridor. In addition, an extensive outreach effort was launched to reach out to underrepresented minority communities, particularly Spanish-speaking and Hmong populations. Specific components of the outreach effort are listed below.

- A contacts database of more than 1,200 contacts comprising CBOs, ethnic-based organizations, service clubs, elected officials, and other individuals and organizations interested in transportation planning, was compiled.
- A meeting announcement/newsletter was developed and distributed using the contacts database to provide information about the public meetings.
- Media-relations efforts were conducted throughout the corridor and included free media publicity (news releases) and paid advertisements (radio spots and display print advertisements) in predetermined radio stations and newspapers.
- Community and stakeholder outreach was administered to more than 300 organizations to help spread the word to their organization members and constituents.

- Elected official outreach was conducted to inform staff of the public meetings.

Public Meetings

Five public meetings were held in cities along the corridor—Stockton, Merced, Fresno, Tulare, and Bakersfield—between November 9 and 18, 2004. More than 140 community members attended all five meetings. The dates, locations, and attendance at each meeting are summarized below. Each meeting included the following format:

- 1. open house session,*
- 2. presentation and overview of the Master Plan effort,*
- 3. interactive polling session/facilitated discussion, and*
- 4. question and comment session.*

Location	Date	Attendance
Stockton	November 9, 2004	25
Merced	November 10, 2004	33
Fresno	November 16, 2004	45
Tulare	November 17, 2004	28
Bakersfield	November 18, 2004	12

Interactive Polling

At each meeting, interactive polling was used to obtain real-time information, including demographic information and specific data with regard to the draft Master Plan.



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Key questions/topics related to the draft Master Plan are listed below:

- How often do you use Route 99?
- What is your primary use of Route 99?
- How satisfied are you with the overall appearance of Route 99 in your area?
- Rating of corridor themes.



Figure 1-6
Interactive polling

In addition, meeting participants were asked to rank seven aesthetic elements by importance and were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with how each element was currently being achieved.

The aesthetic elements included:

- roadside landscaping,
- roadside litter and weeds,
- consistency of pavement appearance,
- appearance of bridges/structures,
- appearance of billboards,
- land use next to freeway, and
- scenic vistas.

The top three aesthetic elements of most importance for all five meetings were

- roadside litter and weeds,
- roadside landscaping, and
- appearance of bridges/structures.

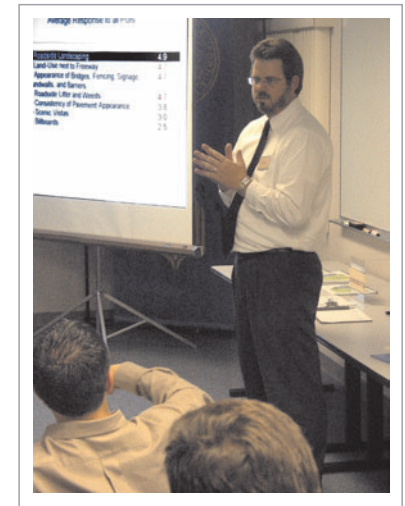


Figure 1-7
Reviewing results of the Interactive polling

1.5.3 Public Meeting Comments

A variety of formats was used to collect public comments on the draft Master Plan. Members of the public could comment by telephone, email, or comment cards, and comments were also verbally captured on the flipcharts. Approximately 250 comments were received through the deadline of December 20, 2004.

